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ABSTRACT

In this speech, given at the inauguration of Dr. Frank Angel as President of New Mexico Highlands University, Mr. S. P. Marland, Jr., U.S. Commissioner of Education, discusses both the shortcomings and accomplishments of the American education system when it comes to educating Mexican American students. It is noted that even though the Federal government has funded compensatory education programs and projects designed for Spanish-speaking children, the Mexican American students have a higher dropout rate than any other identifiable minority except American Indians. Also noted is the fact that some southwestern schools have begun bilingual programs where subjects are taught in both Spanish and English to all students. A major problem of the education system, which is discussed, is the past failure to teach Mexican American and other minority students to take pride in their cultural background and their national history. Mr. Marland discussed the fact that in school Mexican American children learn "virtually nothing" of their ancestors and that what they do learn is uncomplimentary. It is also pointed out that very few school staff members in the 5 southwestern states are Mexican Americans and that Spanish is excluded from the classroom, playground, and in school communications to parents. (NQ)

COMPLETING THE REVOLUTION*

By S. P. Marland, Jr.
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

Presidente Francisco Angel, colegas, destinguidos profesores alumnos, amigos, padres de los graduantes y graduantes de honor damas y caballeros.

Lastima que no puedo dar este discurso en espanol. Sin embargo, por falta de espanol, y por ser un gringo sin cultura suya, voy ah continuar en ingles.

Estas son las palabras que me dio Armando Rodriguez mi muy estimado amigo y colega.

I have tried to greet you in Spanish, and I would ask your pardon for my bad pronunciation. But I must deliver the rest of my remarks in English. I thought first of apologizing because, while I cannot speak your language, you can speak mine. But after thinking the matter over, I realized that my apology must be of a different character: while you can speak two of our languages, I can speak only one. It is generous of you to welcome a U.S. Commissioner of Education who is at least 50 percent illiterate.

I do not say this in an attempt at humor, nor to win your good will with a diplomatic but insincere criticism of myself. I say it because there is a partial truth in it, and it bears on the theme of my remarks today.

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*At the inauguration of Dr. Frank Angel as President of New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, New Mexico, Monday, June 5, 1972, 10:00 a.m.

It would be easy to point out that this is a wonderful day for Spanish-speaking American citizens; that the inauguration of a Mexican-American as president of one of the Nation's universities marks a major advance for the Chicano; and that this day promises a better future for the education of those Americans whose heritage is Spanish and Indian.

All these things would be true -- or, at least, predictable. But our Nation has 1,400 colleges and universities that offer the bachelor's degree and above. The first of them was founded in 1636. Thus it seems to me, in a sense that I am sure President Angel will understand, somehow inaccurate to celebrate the fact that, 340 years later, one of our 1,400 senior educational institutions should be headed by an American of Mexican descent. Instead of saying "Isn't it wonderful?", we should be asking "What took us so long?"

Today I would like to explore that question, and to pursue a different train of thought than might be expected on this occasion. For I am not at all sure that today's real significance is for Chicanos. I suspect if we look at this event from a different angle, we might agree that its more profound meaning is for **Anglos** -- my fellow illiterates.

Since the early 1960's, one of the major educational concerns of the Federal government has been improving the achievement of those whom we designate as the "culturally deprived," the "socio-economically disadvantaged," and so forth. In trying to do

something about this problem, we have taken a number of tacks. One was to increase the quantity of the resources that went into every youngster's education -- to make sure that he had enough books, to improve his chances for attending a school that had a chemistry or physics laboratory, to ensure that he had access to the materials of learning.

Second, we have tried to improve the quality of those resources. We have sponsored training programs in which teachers could learn about new instructional techniques; we have helped school systems purchase items of technology that approach old educational tasks in a new way; and we have sponsored curriculum development projects designed to give traditional subjects new life and interest.

And third, we have invested heavily in the concept known as "compensatory education." We know that, in this society, the Anglo, middle-class youngster has a head start on his peers of other races and national origins from the moment he starts first grade. Because of our history, our economics, because of past and continuing discrimination, the Anglo child's parents tend to have more education, higher-paying jobs, and more influence on the schools. Consequently, to help other youngsters compete fairly in a socially slanted situation, we have tried to devise highly concentrated forms of education to "compensate" them for the advantages that middle-class Anglo youngsters receive at home.

As Secretary Richardson conceded recently, the evidence on Federally funded compensatory programs is mixed. Though a few

succeed, most either fail or produce no clear evidence of success. For all its frustrating history, however, we are continuing to invest in compensatory education because it's the best idea we have.

However, a few bits of evidence here and there make me suspect that there are better ideas -- and that projects designed for Spanish-speaking children may hold the key to a better education for all our children.

In one respect, these projects are unique, because they deal with children who often come to the first grade speaking only Spanish. In the past -- and in many places still, unfortunately -- these children have been expected to blossom out into English as soon as they enter the classroom.

One consequence has been that in some southwestern school districts, 40 percent of Mexican-American children are placed in classes for the mentally retarded or slow; I'm sure we would get the same result if we shipped all our Anglo six-year-olds off to Madrid or Mexico City for first grade. In the southwest, about 86 percent of Anglo youngsters graduate from high school; by contrast, only 60 percent of Chicano youngsters do so. Chicano students have a higher drop-out rate than any other identifiable minority except American Indians.

Faced with this appalling record of failure, pushed by a newly militant generation of Chicano young people and adults, some southwestern schools have begun bilingual programs -- not simply <u>allowing</u> Spanish to be spoken in the classroom, but

teaching subjects in both Spanish and English to all students.

Three years ago, the Office of Education put a tentative foot in this new water by financing 76 bilingual programs enrolling 25,000 students. Today, encouraged by the results and with the cooperation of more school districts, we are financing 213 bilingual projects enrolling about 100,000 students. Nor are these restricted to the Southwest; a school in Washington, D.C. enrolling primarily black students is engaged in a bilingual, Spanish-English program.

Encouraging as these bilingual projects are, I suspect that language is only one part of the educational problem for Chicanos in the United States. The larger part, the more important part, is cultural. Some educators working in the southwest have noticed a curious phenomenon: they note that youngsters brought to the U.S. from Mexico in their teens often do better in school than Chicano youngsters born on this side of the border -- despite the fact that the Mexican children usually have to learn English. Somehow, many of them overcome that handicap quickly and surpass classmates who have been studying English for years.

The explanation I've heard is that Mexican youngsters have been taught to take pride in their background, their national history -- and that this sense of pride helps them learn, even after they transfer to an American school and have to start English from scratch. American Chicano children, by contrast, learn virtually nothing of their ancestors -- and what they do learn is uncomplimentary. It goes against the human grain, even

in a child, to be required to learn to read -- and then to read that your forefathers were unimportant, that their customs and beliefs did not deserve attention from the majority culture --- and that you likewise are destined to be nobody, with no cultural heritage of your own.

And yet that is precisely what, to a striking degree, our schools do. I am not talking about blatant prejudice. I am talking about something much more subtle, much less conscious. I am talking about a cultural attitude that penalizes not only minority children, but majority children as well.

Let us consider for a moment what we term "ancient history". As all of us know, ancient history is about Greeks and Romans. The Babylonians and Assyrians come in for a page or two, mostly describing their habit of cutting their prisoners' heads off and making a pile out of them. The Egyptians get considerably more space. We read of them that they wrote on papyrus, learned to predict floods, built pyramids, and were ruled by kings called "pharaohs". If we were really energetic, we took the trouble to learn how to spell "Nefertiti". We learned a few phrases about the Egyptians to get us through exams, and promptly forgot about them.

More to the point, however, school forgot about the Egyptians, too. It is only when the British Admiral Nelson meets Napoleon's fleet at the Battle of the Nile in 1798 that we hear anything about Egypt again -- and in this case, a nation of great antiquity serves

merely as the backdrop for a fight between two European Caucasian nations.

What were the Egyptians doing for 2,000 years? Were they merely lying around on the beach, waiting for Europeans to show up and have a battle -- or were they conducting a national life of their own?

Let us move up a bit in what American schools are pleased to call "history." Consider medieval history. Here we encounter Edward the Confessor, William the Conqueror, Rolfe the Walker, Prince Henry the Navigator, Queen Isabella, Joan of Arc, Magellan, Vasco da Gama, Charlemagne, et cetera, et cetera. As you will notice, I don't have them arranged in chronological order. We learn that Columbus discovered America. Recently, some American Indians have taken to claiming that <u>they</u> not only discovered America --- they discovered Columbus, too.

Whatever the truth of that matter, our medieval history is made up almost entirely of European names -- English, Spanish, Italian, French, Dutch, German. We hear of Kubla Khan, true -- but mainly because he was visited by Marco Polo, a European. We read of the Chinese that they invented paper and gunpower. Presumably the Chinese had a medieval history, too -- but we do not hear of them again until they go to war with the European powers in the mid-19th century. As for Africa, of course, it might as well not have existed from the fall of Carthage in 146 B.C. until 1619, when the Dutch stopped there to capture slaves and bring them to the New World.

Let us move up in time to an event that has had a major influence on how all of us live: the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Sir Francis Drake in 1588. This battle marked the high point of Spain's influence in Europe; until then, it was the world's most powerful country. After that battle, England, France, and Holland increasingly challenged Spain, both here and in Europe.

What principally interests me about that battle in the context of these remarks is the attitude of the American schoolboy when he reads about the Armada. I recall, as a student, having the definite impression that we won. Not only the English, but we. Similarly when the English expelled Peter Stuyvesant from New Amsterdam; we won. The same when General Wolfe defeated General Montcalm on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec; we won.

I do not believe that my attitude was unique. I think it was shared by my classmates -- even though some of them were the descendants of French and Dutch whom the English had expelled. And recalling that impression, I started to wonder, who is this we I'm talking about? Who is this we who remember Leonidas as a hero -- but cannot think of one Persian hero? Who is this we who conveniently tuck Egypt and China into some historical attic for 2,000 years, do not encounter Africa until the 17th century, and learn virtually nothing about Central and South America until Teddy Roosevelt decides to build a canal there?

We, of course, is the American people -- or is it? The ancient and medieval history I have been describing is not the ancient and medieval history of the world; it is the ancient and medieval history of England. What we present as American history

is, until 1776, English history. And even after that date, our "American" history is dominated by English descendants.

Now there is, of course, sound historical reason for this. England is prominent in our past, English is our dominant tongue, and it would be absurd to pretend that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson sprang from nowhere.

Yet there is a certain cultural mischief resulting from our criteria for selecting events, for deciding what belongs in American history and proud folklore and what doesn't. We interpret our history largely in a military sense, as a chronicle of battles with people who can be forgotten as soon as they are defeated. And what of the cultural heritage and art --- the music, and the patterns of living? We again gather our ancestral threads from cultural history in an extremely limited European sense. Do we want our children to believe that only people with fair skins are important, and that other people are beneath notice?

Do we do justice by our children of Chinese descent to encourage, by omissions in our history books, the idea that their homeland was of no importance until the Opium War with England in 1839? Shall we require young black children to learn that their ancestors were beneath historical notice until they landed on our eastern coast in chains? Shall we require Chicano children to memorize the date of the Pilgrim landing at Plymouth Rock -- without asking Anglo children to remember that Santa Fe was established in 1610, a decade before the Mayflower, and remains the oldest seat of government in the United States?

Closer to our own time, shall Pancho Villa be regarded only as

a Mexican bandit, a south-of-the-border thug, important only because General John Pershing chased him once? Or shall we mention that his real name was Doroteo Arango; that at the age of 14 he stabbed a Mexican official who had tried to assault his sister; that as a military leader he developed tactics to rival Napoleon's; that he was at first supported by Woodrow Wilson and by a considerable amount of money from gringo oil and cattle men; and that the Mexican government, with good reason, declared him a "Hero of the Revolution"?

And what of American Indian children? Can we expect them to take pride in being citizens of a Nation whose history books tell them their great-grandfatners were barbarous savages, good for nothing but running around in rags and getting drunk on white man's whisky? General George Custer and his men are martyrs, Chief Crazy Horse and his men are villains; why? The Sioux and the Cheyenne, after all, did not raid Boston or New York in order to put white men on a reservation. Is it not possible that Crazy Horse was at least as good a general as Custer, and that he capitalized on an opportunity that any West Pointer would be taught to look for?

Let me speak a little more directly toward the pressing educational needs of Mexican Americans. I have touched on the exclusion of the historical role of the Mexican American in our schools. But there is more to this than history. I am speaking of the exclusion of Spanish from the classroom and the playground. Today there still exists the common practice of the school to

employ non-Mexican American community relations specialists from existing faculty personnel, to continue to send communications to parents in English only, to conduct P-TA meetings in English with an occasional interpretation in Spanish, and to set up advisory boards and employ educational consultants whose understandings are only marginally related to the educational problems of the Mexican American. For instance, only 24 percent of the elementary schools in the Southwest with 10 percent or more Mexican-American students send notices to parents in both Spanish and English. In the secondary schools the situation is even worse.

In the area of staffing in the five southwestern states, a recent HEW survey showed that only 3.6 percent of teachers were Mexican-American. These teachers were relating to more than 1,300,000 pupils of Spanish Surname --- 17.2 percent of the entire school population. The picture is even more dismal when looking at the number of Mexican-American principals, counselors and other administrative personnel. Out of more than 9,000 non-teaching full-time staff in the five southwestern States, only 576 are Mexican American. That is a total of six percent.

What are some of the results of this discrimination? We know that Mexican Americans drop out before high school graduation at more than three times the rate of Anglos. Fewer than one out of six Mexican Americans who finish high school in Texas enter college. In Colorado only 1 out of 5 go to college and in your state fewer than 1 out of 3. And it is becoming quite evident that despite the introduction of such programs as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and

Special Services a frightening percentage of those Mexican Americans who do enter college never finish.

The needs of teachers who serve the Mexican American are many and complex. To speak the language is not sufficient. As I mentioned one of the major contributing factors to the failure of the Mexican American child in school is cultural denial. The insight of the teacher to the feelings and fears of the Mexican American is paramount. Language coupled with some exposure to cultural environment may help, but it is fundamentally important that teachers come to the school equipped with an understanding of the Mexican American and his heritage.

We have not yet come to terms with our past -- and partially because of that failure, we find it difficult to come to terms with our present. Four years from now, we will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the American Revolution. It would be worth a celebration if, by that time, all of us could figure out what that Revolution might really have meant.

It meant that, in the course of human events, one people found it necessary to dissolve the political bonds that connected them with another. Our problem has been that, in 200 years of trying, we have not yet defined which people that "one people" is.

It is above all a <u>new</u> people. No matter how far back we wish to trace our various lineages -- to Montezuma, to Charlemagne, to the Mayflower, to the <u>conquistadores</u> -- we cannot afford any longer to allow our separate pasts to interfere with our efforts to build a Nation together. If we face the truth objectively, moreover, we will be forced to admit that, with the single exception of the

American Indian, we are composed largely of the descendants of adventurers and social misfits, of rebels, of fugitives and also-rans, the wretched refuse of everybody's teeming shores. If you are rich or powerful or comfortable at home, you do not cross a couple of thousand miles of ocean -- Atlantic or Pacific -- in a sail boat.

Though we may celebrate our Revolution for the 200th time in 1976, we have yet to complete it. We have yet to walk around in this great big tent and to realize that the other people under it -- white, black, yellow, red, brown -- are not participants in a side-show, not curiosities to be viewed as peculiar; rather, we are all part of this curious American circus, and we have a wonderful culture of our own to build, borrowing from many places and yet unique because it partakes so widely of the history of virtually all men. And the building is far from finished. A culture that need not be melted down into a uniform mass before we can call it "American," but a culture that is American precisely because we value difference rather than trying to eliminate it. A great painting or mosaic is made of many different colors and shadings. It is not a mass of muddy mixtures, blended beyond recognition.

We will not complete our Revolution in four years. Yet this University and this occasion represent a victory in a continuing American Revolution. This University is intended to join the Spanish, Indian, and Anglo streams of our national heritage -- and in so doing, it will conserve and protect an ingredient of our common culture which we Anglos are in danger of losing. Perhaps

if you teach us to value the Chicano heritage, we can, together, set about reassembling the rest.

For 200 years now, our national origin as well as our national goal has been expressed in Latin: E pluribus unum --- one from many. That is an ideal, and so far an unrealized one. But if we can learn to translate our different pasts into a common, shared, and proud present, we will have a chance of becoming what is so well expressed in Spanish: La raza unida.

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